

Social Notes

by Bob England.

We will be holding another Beer and Skittles evening at Kibworth on Friday 18th February. Members wishing to attend should inform the Social committee by the February meeting. Also by then we must know if there is sufficient interest for holding a Birthday Dinner on Friday, 24th March, possibly at the Golf Course. Cost about £13 to £15 per ticket.

The Social committee hope that, once again, we can depend on members' time and generous donations of prizes and cakes etc., for the coffee morning to be held at Harborough Theatre on Saturday February 26th.



On a Saturday in May we are hoping to arrange a day trip to Winchester, with

a visit to the Army Air Corps Museum en route and a refreshment stop at Newbury RBL Club on the return journey. We need about 30 seats to be taken to justify booking a coach at £10 or less - a full coach would cost only £6.50 a seat - so names, please at the February meeting.

I need to know as soon as possible how many places to reserve for the proposed trip to Normandy from 3rd to 7th September.

Non-members are welcome to join any of these events, so if you, your family or friends wish to book or you need more information please phone me on MH 464288.

There is a vacancy on the Social Committee and they would welcome another member to help with planning and organising a quite ambitious programme of activities.

For Your Diary

Please note that the Lunch planned for 25th January has been cancelled.

- 9 Feb Branch Meeting and Buffet
- 18 Feb Beer & Skittles at Railway Inn, Kibworth*
- 23 Feb Branch Committee Meeting
- 26 Feb Coffee Morning at Harborough Theatre**
- 8 Mar Branch Meeting (social event TBA)
- 24 Mar Branch Birthday Dinner**

* For details or to book please contact Bob England (MH 464288).

** See Social Notes on page 16

Meetings

Regular meetings are held on the Second Wednesday of each month at 7.30 pm in the downstairs Function Room, Conservative Club Building, Fairfield Road, Market Harborough.

Following the business part of the next meeting, on 9th February, there will be a finger buffet and a chance for some of our newer and our more established members to get to know one another.

Mr & Mrs F T Ashmore
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LE16 9EA



Reg. Charity No. 219279

The Royal British Legion Market Harborough Branch

Founded in 1923



In Touch

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Editorial

It is January, 2000 and we start this first Issue of the Millennium with a New Year Message from our Chairman and Seasonal Greetings from County Office and HQ. Plans for the Branch's week in the town's Millennium Year are taking shape and the proposed programme of social activities just needs your support to make it a reality. The omens are good: a growing membership; a solid core of hardworking enthusiasts and a sense of purpose. What better way to start the 21st century?

The *In Touch* World News Service reports on conditions in East Timor in November and in East Midlands (Nottingham) on New Year's Eve. A hitherto confidential backroom activity is revealed and two volunteers are unmasked.

From the future and the present we go back over 80 years to a story from the life of the late Mr Charles James who you will remember was presented with Le Légion d'Honneur last year. And Hotspur reminds us of dark days nearly 60 years ago. (Can it really be that long?)

As your new Editor, I must wish you all our readers a Good New Year. I extend a very sincere welcome to new Branch members and hope you find the journal interesting and will make a contribution to it.

Most of us think our own experiences are not worth recording. Wrong!! Anecdotes, thoughts, ideas, gripes, interests, news of past or forthcoming events as well as stories can make interesting reading. Just ring me, Ray Tyler, on 01858 461889 about anything which could be shared with others. We will help with the words!

Finally, I must wish a very good Trading New Year to the firms that support us by advertising in *In Touch*. We thank them and trust this support will continue.



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Visit to Ireland with the Royal Field Artillery, 1916.

I have recently had the pleasure to read the personal life story of the late CHARLIE JAMES of Market Harborough, who received the Légion d'Honneur last year. Charlie James served this Country in two wars, spent a lifetime with the Railways and in his 80's wrote his memoirs in a clear strong hand and with detailed recall. We are honoured to have been lent his manuscript by his daughter with permission to copy from it. I am sure you would wish me to include from time to time some snippets for you to enjoy. Editor

Before he joined up in the First World War in 1916 he spent much time with farm animals and specially horses. He was groom to a tiled family, and as horses and mules were the main means of transport in the 1914 to 1916 war his skill was very valuable. This is part of the story about his visit with the army to Ireland.

Charlie wanted to join the Royal Army Medical Corps but when he joined up in 1916 he was posted to the The Royal Field Artillery as a Gunner. "After training I was posted to Ireland along with fourteen other Gunners, and twenty five Drivers. Gunners and Drivers trained separately and seldom mixed. We were put on a train at High Wycombe Station for Paddington, and then marched to Euston for the Irish Mail to Holyhead. We crossed the Irish Sea in the night. The sea was very rough and we were all seasick. We entrained at North Wall, Dublin, and crossed Ireland to Limerick and joined the 59th Divisional Ammunition Column, based in the Old Butter Market. It was here that I became Batman to 1st Lieutenant

Shields who had captained Leicester County Cricket Club before the War....."

".... My best pal was in charge of a mule that kicked. I showed him how to grip the hind leg just above the hock joint and so it would fling the mule away instead of kicking him. The majority of Limerick people were against us and even the kids used to spit at us and say "Go Home English Dogs". I used to wait for 1st Lieutenant Shields to return at about 10 o'clock. One night some Irishmen came out of a pub, and came towards me and shouted "Get Him". I ran for the door of the Butter Market and asked the guard to let me in but to stop the bloke behind me. He did so with his rifle butt. He was kept in the Guard room until the following morning.

We were supposed to be home for Christmas 1916, but because some of the Leicesters upset some Irishmen coming out of a pub, we were not able to get the horses on board the ferry at Dublin until well after Christmas. We had a smooth crossing to Liverpool, and then on to Larkhill on Salisbury Plain. Knowing that we would soon be off to France, Lieutenant Hetherington gave the Officers, their wives and lady friends a dinner and dance. The officers' batmen acted as waiters, and after the dinner we had to clean up. After the meal I went to see my boss and asked if there was anything else before I left. The answer came "get me a bottle of whisky". I was told I needed a chit. This infuriated my boss who gave me a chit for two bottles of whisky. He gave one to me to take to my Father when I went on leave. He was delighted."

More about action in the First World War from these memoirs to come. One Problem. Why did the army send the heavy guns and horses of the Royal Field Artillery to Ireland? Editor

A New Year Message from our Lady Chairman

As we enter the 21st Century it is a time of hope and renewal.

No doubt many changes will occur in the next few years, one change which has already been made in our own branch is the post of Editor of **In Touch**. Bernard Halsall retired from that position at the AGM in November 1999, and one of our newer members, Ray Tyler, has taken over. We wish him every success. I am pleading to all members to give him all the encouragement and help we can, so please let him have any bits of news, titbits, etc.

We have a very busy year ahead of us - both work and pleasure. So if we all contribute what we can comfortably cope with this will ease the pressure on our various committee members. Many thanks for your support.

I wish all the members and their families a healthy and successful year.

Con Halsall

Greetings from On High

No this is not a message passed on by Branch Chaplain, Chris Moody, but a reference to the Seasonal Good Wishes from County Chairman, Tony Griffith and CFO, Peter Locket, given in the December County Circular and to the Christmas Message of thanks in the Legion Letter from HQ to "all our volunteers and staff for their tremendous efforts and continued contribution to the work of The Royal British Legion over the past year." Ω

George & John on the Telly!

Did you watch that part of the BBC TV New Year's Eve epic called Reflection and Hope?

For the viewer, the whole day-long programme linking events throughout the world was a remarkable technical achievement. For those who were involved in the link to the Royal British Legion's ceremony at Nottingham it was a bitterly cold, patience testing experience and disappointing for the 68 Standard Bearers who had expected to parade as part of the TV episode. However, it was a proud day for George Fleming, who in his new role as deputy County Standard Bearer and at short notice, had to deputise for the County man who was ill. Congratulations, George. This meant that John Cox had the honour of carrying the Branch Standard. It is unlikely that you spotted either of them on screen but they were there - in front of that huge War Memorial. Ω

Poppy Appeal Organiser

Following Peter Wilson's decision to relinquish the job of PAO, there was a call for volunteers to be considered as a successor. The post is a Head Office appointment but usually made on the recommendation of the Branch. At the Branch meeting on 12th January, Tom Joacock said that he was willing to have this name put forward with that of his wife Betty, if that was the wish of Members present. It was their wish!

The Chairman again thanked Peter for all the good work he had done for the Poppy Appeal over many years and was sure that his successor would benefit from his experience and be able to call on him for help and advice. Ω

W. S. Churchill

by Hotspur.

As we enter the 21st century it may be worth recalling that 60 years ago in May 1940, we had an army of nearly 500,000 men with all their impedimenta entrenched in France. On 10th May the Germans invaded Holland, Belgium and France on a huge scale.

On the 11th May the Prime Minister resigned and Winston Spencer Churchill became Prime Minister. By the end of the Month the battle was over. Although over 300,000 troops were rescued and brought back to the U.K., most of their equipment had been lost. The enemy occupied the Channel Coast. Invasion seemed imminent. Resistance seemed difficult, to say the least.

On the 4th June, and again on the 17th June, Churchill addressed the House of Commons. Here is a short paragraph from each address, unaltered from the original. I believe that this time Churchill mobilized our language, when there was precious little left with which to fight.

Continued from p 9

All the people here are normally very calm by nature but they become very agitated and violent whenever violent whenever they spot a militia". With 200,00 still waiting to return from West Timor, Ben expects "a big increase in violence... as the people try to get even with the Militia."

Finally he says "Despite all this I am having a good tour so far. My company is now up to 220 so I have lots of people to look after".

Thank goodness we don't have scorpions in our bedding over here. Horrid things. Editor

As we celebrate in January 2000
we should also remember

JUNE 1940

*We shall not flag or fail,
We shall go on to the end,
We shall fight in the seas and oceans,
We shall fight with growing confidence in the air,
We shall defend our Island whatever the cost may be,
We shall fight on the beaches,
We shall fight on the landing grounds,
We shall fight in the fields - and in the streets,
We shall fight in the hills,
WE SHALL NEVER SURRENDER.*

*Let us therefore, brace ourselves to our duties,
So bear ourselves, that if the British Commonwealth and
Empire lasts a thousand years, men will still say
"THIS WAS THEIR FINEST HOUR".*

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To prove that every trace of the date change problem has been eliminated, I am starting this report just before midnight on New Year's Eve and will continue through the transition from one millennium to the next.



Editor - I hope that either you were kidding or you have fixed it!! As they say, "To err is human but to really foul things up requires a computer".

Millennium Celebrations

If you read the Harborough Mail, you cannot have missed the near half-page piece about the proposals for the RBL week 6th to 12th November. We, like many other groups in the town, have accepted responsibility for mounting events for the community. Tom Jeacock, with help from other members, is developing an ambitious programme. This includes a Concert by the Harborough Band; a Garden of Remembrance with a named cross for each of the 326 dead from the two World Wars commemorated on the War Memorials, a Book of Honour giving details where known of each casualty's place of burial or the memorial where he is honoured; a ACF marching band display; other activities involving youth and ideas still being considered and not yet conceived. All of this superimposed on the usual activity of the Poppy Appeal and Remembrancetide!!

Serving In East Timor

By The Editor

You will remember the problems in East Timor, when the Indonesian Forces pulled out, and left the population to the mercy of the militia whom the local people hated and from whom they fled.

I have been reading in an e-mail from Ted MacNabb, a contributor to the Legion Electronic Mailing List, a letter from M W O (Master Warrant Officer) Ben Boudreau serving with the Canadian Army contingent of the United Nations Peace-keeping Force in East Timor. The letter is dated 16th November, last.

In light-hearted style Ben complains of the heat (32°C in the shade), rain every night ("lots of it") and mud, of the "15 foot long crocodiles in the river and the sharks further out to sea" which prevent him swimming. After "a fantastic supper, cooked by the New Zealanders" there is little to do except prepare for bed. "...shake every bit of kit to set the scorpions free, but they don't like the rain...so they will come back (along with the spiders and the 8 inch centipedes)." He does have a "Mozy Net", but the version issued is without a floor, which "stops anything which flies" but not "what is crawling".

In more serious vein, he mentions "cute little houses, school, hospital, and market places that used to be there before they were set on fire....we meet nice people, most of them refugees coming back to what used to be their home. Amazingly they are all smiling and waving at us.....500 today with 10 militia hiding among them. They got spotted and the villagers started beating the crap out of them. They tried to hang a woman (militia).... and we had to get her out too....We took them all to Brigade HQ" for interrogation.

Continued on p 10

The January Branch Meeting

Welcome.

In a simple ceremony the Chairman presented Membership badges to Mrs. Vida Edwards and Mrs. Phyllis Sutton. It is with great pleasure that we also welcome the following members who have joined us since 1st October, and who will receive their badges in due course,

- Mr Barry Peck.
Mrs Kathleen Noble
Mrs Joyce Stimpson
Sir Michael Carlton-Smith.
Mr. David Grove.

We trust they will enjoy being with us.

Donation Acknowledged

The Treasurer has received a letter from the Head of Fund-raising for St Dunstons, thanking the Branch for its donation of £100 and saying that it will help to improve the quality of life of the Blind ex-Service people in its care.

[Under the terms of the Legion's Royal Charter and Rules, donations may only be made to Charities having the same purpose as our own i.e. to serve the ex-service community]



Welfare

The Service (Welfare) Committee has given help and advice to a local War Widow who wished to visit her husband's grave. Contact was made with Pilgrimages Department (now renamed Remembrance Travel) as a matter of urgency as this is the last year in which there will be a Government Grant for such visits.

[Betty West (MH 434923) has a copy of the latest list of visits and Tom Jeacock (MH 466829) a copy of the full colour brochure.]

The Quiz.

Most members stayed on after the business part of the meeting to take part in a quiz about Market Harborough. It showed how much people miss as they walk around the town. There were no prizes but the winners were promised a mention in these pages. They were Keith Bowley, Kath Noble and Peter Wilson.



Mr B

The Barber

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The Secret's Out!

(author's name withheld for security reasons)

The plan was so secret that even the Editors, past and present, did not know of it. But here it is, just as was intended, the scoop of the year (so far), here in the first issue of **In Touch** of the New Millennium. Here, we put into perspective, all the hype over the last few months which appeared in newspapers, in magazines, on radio and on TV. Yes, here is the inside story of the extensive programme of investigation, testing and simulation undertaken to ensure that no disaster should befall you, fellow members, as the clocks in the Branch's computers advanced from the final *tic* of 31/12/99 to the first *toc* of 1/1/00. It was important that 00 should mean 2000 and not 1900 otherwise you each would have been long overdue for the birthday telegram from the Queen and you would have joined the Legion before it was formed.

We do understand that some (most?) members think that computers are things of mystery, of black art and the creation of the Devil and so close their minds to the whole subject. However, there is a growing number of your fellow members who, for one reason or another, have ventured into this dark world. Some have been shamed into it by their 8 & 10 years old children or grandchildren, some younger members use computers at work, some abandoned their trusty and clanking Remington for a Word Processor and then took the next step to acquire a "real computer" and there are two whose first encounter with this nether kingdom dates back to when it was home to beasts not very different to Bletchley Park's Code-breaking Colossus.

It would have been fascinating to investigate in some depth how each of this elite band of computer aware members tackled the daunting task of tracking down this insidious creature known as the Y2K Bug. Professional reticence on their part and inadequate funding by the powers that be for a properly conducted programme of research has unfortunately limited the scope of our enquiries. Statisticians will tell you that conclusions based on a sample of one cannot be representative of the whole group, but with that proviso we reproduce overleaf the report prepared by a member known for his technical expertise, his determination to do things right and who is thought to have kept in touch with the other investigators. In short, it is likely to give a pretty general picture of the work that was undertaken in your interests on the computers in the Branch. It should also be noted that the report is reproduced in full, just as it was produced on the member's computer. We trust that even the sceptical will now have confidence in this area of technology and those who have become its devotees.